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*Vietnam: (Information as of 4:30 AM EST)

Political Developments in South Vietnam: [There are increasing indications that Premier Ky expects to be the military's candidate for president under the new constitution.]

[Ky recently designated Nguyen Huu Chi, a former civilian province chief in central Vietnam, as special assistant to the premier's office and as his personal campaign manager,]

[Chi's duties reportedly will include lining up suitable running mates for Ky and potential province chiefs who might be appointed to help Ky get elected.]

[Ky also desires to accept an invitation to address a press group in the United States in April, apparently in the belief that such a visit would boost his presidential chances.]

[Despite Ky's apparently growing confidence, there is no indication that Chief of State Thieu, the other leading military presidential hopeful, has decided not to run. Thieu is believed to have considerable high-level military support, but he is alleged to have told a Constituent Assembly member recently that he would withdraw in Ky's favor rather than split the military over the issue.]

[Backers of civilian presidential aspirants, in an effort to assess civilian prospects, are eyeing the possible outcome of the Ky-Thieu contest and its effect on military unity. The campaign manager for one leading civilian prospect recently told a US Embassy officer that it was increasingly evident that no civilian regime could govern without military support, and that military unity was essential for future stability.]

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[The Constituent Assembly, meanwhile, has ensured Premier Ky's eligibility for the future presidency by setting the minimum age qualification at 35 rather than 40 as demanded by some southern deputies. The assembly, on 17 February, began to debate the chapter of the draft constitution dealing with the executive branch, after completing the section on the legislative branch.]

The Military Situation in South Vietnam: A large-scale Allied campaign to drive elements of two North Vietnamese/Viet Cong divisions out of the heavily populated coastal lowlands of Quang Ngai Province resulted in some heavy action over the weekend.

A South Vietnamese airborne battalion, one of seven participating in Operation LIEN KET 81, was attacked by an estimated enemy battalion at dawn on 19 February in an area about ten miles northwest of Quang Ngai City. Both sides sustained casualties in the ensuing 12-hour bloody battle. Cumulative casualties since the inception of the operation show 44 South Vietnamese soldiers killed and 186 wounded as against 281 enemy killed. A large number of Communist weapons were also captured.

LIEN KET 81, a search and destroy operation, is being coordinated with South Korean Marine Operation GIANT DRAGON and US Marine Operation RIO GRANDE.

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Guatemala: [The continuing split between the Communist Party (PGT) and its action group, the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), has resulted in stepped-up terrorism in Guatemala City.]

[The recent killings have been carried out by a special FAR guerrilla team which entered the capital from the northeast to take retaliatory measures against armed forces officers who have allegedly participated in counterguerrilla action.]

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[The new FAR group is operating in the capital because the PGT and its urban terrorist units have not been willing to take the measures believed necessary by the FAR.]

[A popular air force officer was killed on 16 February and an unsuccessful attempt was made on another one later that day. The following day a policeman was killed and a resulting exchange of fire in a residential district caused at least one more death. In addition several persons have been wounded and at least two innocent bystanders killed. Guerrilla casualties are not definitely known, but two may have been captured.]

[A great deal of anger has been generated among the military, and although tempers seem to have returned to more normal levels, it is possible that the government may be pressured to take stronger steps against the guerrillas and the university--which the terrorists use as a haven. The ineffectual chiefs of the judicial and national police have been replaced in an effort to placate the military.]

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